

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5257

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 5402

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IN, NP

SUBJECT: VISIT OF THE NEPALESE PRIME MINISTER: APRIL 7-14

REF: NEW DELHI 5260

1. ACCORDING TO INDIAN AND NEPALESE SOURCES HERE, GON PRIME MINISTER TULSI GIRI CAME TO INDIA TO CLEAR THE AIR IN INDO-NEPALESE RELATIONS. HE SOUGHT TO DO THIS MAINLY BY IMPROVING HIS RELATIONS WITH MRS. GANDHI. NEPALESE HERE IN DELHI SEE THE VISIT AS SATISFACTORY. THEY BELIEVE THAT PROGRESS WAS MADE IN IMPROVING THE OVERALL RELATIONSHIP AND THAT THIS WILL SERVE NEPAL WHEN SPECIFIC PROBLEMS WITH INDIA ARISE. WE ARE TOLD THAT THERE WAS NO AGENDA SET FOR THE TALKS BETWEEN MRS. GANDHI AND DR. GIRI AND THAT THE TALKS AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL DID NOT DELVE DEEPLY INTO ANY ISSUES. THE GON APPARENTLY DID NOT PRESS FOR SPECIFIC CONCESSIONS AT THIS TIME. IT IS OUR IMPRESSION THAT WHILE THE INDIANS WERE CORDIAL HOSTS, THEY DID NOT ALLOW THE PLEASANTRIES OF PROTOCOL TO OBFUSCATE THEIR PLAIN TALK. MRS. GANDHI IS QUOTED BY THE PRESS AS SAYING THAT HOW INDIA'S ASSURANCE TO HELP NEPAL "WILL BE GIVEN CONCRETE SHAPE WILL DEPEND ON HOW NEPAL PLAYS ITS CARDS". DURING THIS VISIT THE GOI CONFIRMED TO THE GON THAT
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IT SAW POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES AS LINKED. THE NEPALESE

ATTITUDE IS THAT THE GON DOES NOT SEEK ECONOMIC CONCESSIONS, BUT MERELY WHAT IT IS ENTITLED TO UNDER EXISTING AGREEMENTS. IN ANY CASE, THE NEPALESE BELIEVE THAT THE INDIANS WILL CONTINUE TO BE VERY HARD BARGAINERS BUT ARE SOMEWHAT HOPEFUL THAT THE RELATIONSHIP WHICH DR. GIRI HAS ESTABLISHED WITH MRS. GANDHI WILL FACILITATE THE GIVE AND TAKE.

2. HYDRO-ELECTRIC, FLOOD CONTROL PROJECTS: ALL LOCAL SOURCES AGREE THAT THIS HAS TOP PRIORITY ON INDIA'S AGENDA FOR NEPAL. THE "TIMES OF INDIA" IN AN APRIL 10 EDITORIAL PUT IT THIS WAY: "...THE GROWTH OR LACK OF GROWTH OF INDO-NEPALESE RELATIONS WILL DEPEND ABOVE ALL ON KATHMANDU'S WILLINGNESS OR UNWILLINGNESS TO GO AHEAD WITH MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL SCHEMES FOR HARNESSING THE COMMON RIVERS AND TO STEP UP ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION." ACCORDING TO NEPALESE COUNSELOR JAI RANA, THE GON HAS NOW COMMITTED ITSELF TO A TIME BOUND AGREEMENT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FIVE PROJECTS INCLUDING KARNALI, THE RAPTI, AND PANCHESWAR. A MEMBER OF THE NEPALESE DELEGATION TOLD THE DCM THAT THE GON AGREEMENT WAS LIMITED TO CONDUCTING SITE SURVEYS. MEA OFFICIALS VIEW THE GON'S AGREEMENT AS DESCRIBED BY RANA.

3. TRADE AND TRANSIT AGREEMENT: NEPALESE COUNSELOR RANA NOW BELIEVES THAT THE PROBLEMS WITH THE EXISTING TREATY ARE THOSE OF INTERPRETATION AND IMPLEMENTATION. NO MAJOR OVERHAUL OF THE TREATY IS REQUIRED. THE GON HAS NOW APPARENTLY ABANDONED ANY NOTION OF REPLACING THE PRESENT TREATY WITH SEPARATE TREATIES ON TRADE AND TRANSIT. THE NEPALESE UNDERSTAND THAT AS POLITICAL RELATIONS WITH INDIA IMPROVE, THE IRRITANTS IN MATTERS OF TRANSIT WILL DECREASE. RANA NOTED, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THE PROBLEM OF OBTAINING RAILWAY WAGONS FOR THE MOVEMENT OF GOODS FROM CALCUTTA HAS CONSIDERABLY IMPROVED. (TREATY NEGOTIATIONS ARE TO BEGIN IN DELHI IN JUNE AT THE SECRETARIAL LEVEL, ACCORDING TO RANA.)

4. ZONE OF PEACE: DR. GIRI APPARENTLY WAS NOT ABLE TO PERSUADE MRS. GANDHI OF THE MERITS OF THIS PROPOSAL.

5. COMMENT: IF THE NEPALESE LEADERS EVER HAD ANY DOBT AS TO GOI ATTITUDES, THE GIRI VISIT PRESUMABLY SERVED TO DISPELL
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THEM. THE NEPALESE PRIME MINISTER RETURNS TO KATHMANDU WITH A CLEAR NOTION OF INDIA'S PRIORITIES AND JUST WHAT NEPAL MUST BE PREPARED TO CONCEDE TO OBTAIN WHAT IT SEEKS FROM INDIA.
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